

Acton Community Housing Corporation

Nancy Tavernier, Chairman

TOWN OF ACTON

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TO: Planning Board
FROM: Nancy Tavernier, Chair, Acton Community Housing Corporation
SUBJECT: Support Accessory Apartments zoning amendment
DATE: February 22, 2016

The Acton Community Housing Corporation has voted to support the proposed zoning amendment to revise the Accessory Apartments section of the bylaw. We are very pleased to see the Planning Board put forth the first zoning change to address affordable housing since the adoption of the Housing Production Plan in July 2015 by your board and the Board of Selectmen. This change addresses the need for smaller dwelling units as expressed by citizens taking part in the discussion about housing needs and production during the nine month process.

During the comprehensive housing needs assessment phase, MAPC noted that by 2030 the over-65 population will more than double, while the school-age population will decline by 18%. Senior households will be one-third of the total households. Currently 71% of the households are families but household size is shrinking and the need for smaller units is increasing.

Many residents are now actively seeking downsizing and aging in place options so that they can remain in Acton. This zoning change offers an opportunity for more flexible housing options. An accessory apartment could provide space for family members, aging or otherwise, housing for caregivers, or housing for any 1 or 2 person households. In addition it could provide rental income for senior residents to help them cover the high cost of living in Acton. MAPC determined that more than a third of the households in Acton are housing cost burdened, primarily the elderly. The ability to more easily add an accessory apartment offers a solid opportunity to help senior residents remain in Acton as either landlords or tenants.

We also fully support the proposal to require ground floor apartments to be designed and constructed as adaptable. This too meets one of the housing needs identified in the Housing Production Plan.

We thank you for proposing this zoning change and we thank you also for your support and adoption of the Housing Production Plan. This is the first step toward a long list of Implementation Strategies.

Here is the relevant Goal and Strategy from the Housing Production Plan of 2015.

<http://www.acton-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/3239>

Goal 5: Adopt Zoning Changes to Allow for Housing Choices & Flexible Approaches to Achieve Housing Affordability

Strategy 5.3: Amend the accessory dwelling unit bylaw to better facilitate the development of smaller dwelling units

Acton 2020 establishes the goals of encouraging development of smaller housing options and establishing ways for seniors to age in place. One approach to achieve both is through accessory dwelling unit bylaws. In Acton, an accessory dwelling unit of no more than two bedrooms is allowed by right for single-family homes in Residential, Village, and Business Districts. The accessory apartment must be attached to the principal unit, but distinctly separated by its own entrance on the exterior of the building or a common hallway (unless there is an existing detached building on the property dating to before 1950). In addition to these restrictions, the principal dwelling unit must have been constructed on or before January 1, 1990. ***The Town should consider modifying this requirement to the year 2010, in order to make possible the development of accessory dwellings to a greater portion of Acton's existing housing stock. In addition, the bylaw language should be updated to clarify that permissible alterations for accessory apartments include expansion of the principal building, rather than the current language, which confines alterations to the existing building envelope. Lastly, construction of accessory apartments should be allowed with new construction in designated areas.*** The Town should consider an overlay district for this purpose that comprises the areas surrounding Village centers and Kelley's Corner.